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ABSTRACT

Undertaken to isolate employee characteristics and to determine how they relate to several aspects of employee attitudes toward the corporate newspaper, this study measured the characteristics of employee tenure, job rank, and perceived "self-newspaper" agreement on the manner in which topics were handled within corporate publications. The random sample survey was conducted among the employees of a large West Coast manufacturing firm which specializes in the planning and construction of industrial gas turbine engines and metal alloy research. Main variable effects existed for several dependent attitudinal variables, and several interaction effects occurred for "tenure" and "agreement on the handling of news stories" groupings. It was concluded that the employee's job type and his feelings about the corporate newspaper covering corporate news will have an effect on several attitudinal variables. Several suggestions are made concerning the best method of improving relations with those employees with the least favorable attitude toward the corporate newspaper. (Author/RB)

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Give the Employee What He Wants in the Corporate Newspaper: Improve Employee Relations

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Introduction

The corporate newspaper is designed to benefit two primary groups, corporate management and employees. Many times the corporate newspaper is concurrently viewed by each of these groups as furthering the needs of the other group and not themselves. All too often the stated purpose for a corporate publication is not clear, if it is stated at all.

Unfortunately, a corporate newspaper may develop its own orientation apart from a specifically stated or unwritten rationale upon which the publication was originally based. It is generally accepted that corporate publications exist to improve morale, recognize achievement, or to build confidence in the company. Likewise, a complementary function is to maintain full and effective management-employee communicative contact.

How distortion of these purposes come about, and how one can detect and correct this problem is the purpose of this paper. First, the authors will develop the problem area as others view it; second, an approach to discovering a potential problem in employee orientation toward a corporate newspaper will be discussed; and third, the study analyzing the stated approach will be presented and analyzed, and conclusions will be drawn.

Discussion

When management fearfully guards its "right" to control the amount and substance of content within its company publication is when employees are going to be most disenchanted, and when the general goals of the corporate newspaper are least likely to be met. In this instance, the corporate newspaper merely becomes a reflection of what management wants the employee to know. This information is generally clothed in flowing terms extoling the company. Embedded in all the "good news" is management's perception of how things "have to be" and "should be" with no

questions asked.

In this age of increasing sophistication, company employees are not going to read the corporate newspaper and continue to accept this type of journalistic behavior. As a matter of fact, the employees may be a bit alienated by this behavior. John Bailey, executive director of the International Association of Business Communicators speaks directly to this point in a recent speech. He states:

> "Not often enough will a company truly level with its employees. It won't say, 'these are hard times and here's why.' Too much of it is rosy. Companies should realize that it's not like 40 years ago. . . . when it gets down to the floor, people (employees) laugh at them." (Atlanta Constitution, 1973)

The main point is that management frequently is more concerned about the corporate publication's physical appearance and its "safe" informational content than about the long-run credibility of the publication with employees. This seems to be unwise for both the social and psychological well-being of employees as well as for economic reasons for the employer. A more informed and socio-psychologically consonant employee is a more productive employee.

Previous research in this area of inquiry has pointed out diverging orientations by corporate management and corporate publication editors. A recent study has found that when management becomes highly involved in corporate publication decisions, the editor plays a significantly less important role. Not only that, the publication will develop a strong management-oriented flavor. (Sanders, 1972)

An extensive study of fifty-four U.S. corporations, all having some form of corporate publication, results in conclusions which state:

> "There is always an area of disagreement between company practice and the desires of highly placed company communication people. Not surprisingly, communicators tend to want to be more open on almost all sensitive subjects. . . . Almost all company communicators responding are in favor of communicating bad news as well as good news to employees. However, when bad news is referred to as 'failure,' the picture changes. Communicators whose managements 'never' inform employees of failures usually state their opinions conform with those of their managements on these specific topics." (Ward and Sommerville, 1972, p. 13)

Clearly, management tends to exercise its "fearful" control over corporate publications as often as possible. In many content areas corporate publication

editors are more willing to objectively and accurately present information to employees. Unfortunately, in the "pinch", when the most negativistic news needs to be communicated, is the time when editors are least likely to actively resist management desires for silence.

The most discouraging aspect of management's tendency to withhold certain types of corporate news and information is the fact that many employees cite the corporate publication as a primary and reliable source of information about the company. A series of reports produced by Dr. Albert Walker and sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators highlights the use made of, and the attitude toward, corporate publications by employees. Several of the findings were:

> (1) Employees preferred the company magazine and plant newspaper over all other media or other channels of communication.
> (2) Employee confidence in the company magazine and newspaper appears to increase with age and seniority. Younger employees seem to prefer more personalized communication.
> (3) For the most reliable information, hourly paid employees voted for... all published material over news from people generally.
> (4) The better educated salaried worker rated news from people as a major source of reliable information more often than his lesser educated counterpart. (Walker, 1971)

In summary, one finds that in general the corporate publications are seen as a viable form of communication by employees, however, there are certain groups of employees which do have a greater orientation toward this channel of communication. The older, higher in seniority, hourly, and less educated employee tends to look to corporate publications most as a reliable channel of corporate information. The employee who would be looked upon as being the more "sophisticated", the younger, new employee, salaried, and higher educated is less favorably predisposed toward corporate newspapers. This finding is merely the symptom of the real cause for disenchantment--one-way and narrowly presented corporate news within corporate newspapers.

Study

Problem to be Investigated and Hypothesis

This study is undertaken in order to isolate employee characteristics and how they relate to several aspects of employee attitudes toward the corporate newspaper. The characteristics measured consist of employee tenure, job rank, and perceived "self-newspaper" agreement on the manner in which topics are handled within the corporate publication.

This last predictor variable is not concerned with which topics are presented within the publication, but, once presented, how these topics are handled. Since one topic can be handled in many different ways, the authors are interested in measuring the number of employees who exhibit either a high or low tendency to agree that "the corporate newspaper would handle the topic the way I believe it should be handled." Likewise, it is expected that high-low agreement groups will exhibit a differentially favorable attitude toward the publication.

The dependant variable, attitude toward corporate newspaper, is based on employee responses relating to several characteristics of the publication, such as "information is worthwhile", "gives all points of view", "adequate news about hourly employees", "it is accurate","presents all important issues", and "coverage of news for all departments is balanced".

Based upon the findings in previous studies, the authors hypothesize this relationship between this study's variables:

H_1: The older, non-management, and higher story agreement employee will exhibit a more favorable attitude toward the corporate newspaper.

This expected finding is reflective of the stated problem: "sophisticated" employees are aware that corporate publications are not "open" in the information presented, therefore, these types of employees will have a lower agreement score on how stories are handled in the corporate newspaper, which, in turn, leads to

a negative attitude toward the corporate newspaper in general. Likewise, these employee "sophisticates" may add to management's problems by informing the "non-sophisticates" how the corporate newspaper should be viewed.

Methodology

At the time the survey was conducted (Summer, 1971) there were 3,057 individuals employed by a West Coast manufacturing firm which specializes in the planning and construction of industrial gas turbine engines, as well as metal alloy research. Tallies of the number of newspapers removed from the newsstands revealed a readership of approximately 90% of the employees at the corporation's main plant. This potential readership figure is used as the basis for determining the necessary size of the sample (Parten, p. 312).

In all, 718 questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of all corporation employees. Of these, 188 or 26% resulted in completed returns. This number fell well beyond the 144 returns needed for accepted levels of statistical confidence and tolerated error. Names of employees were assigned to each of the two independent variable categories, tenure and rank, where by the corporation's computer was programmed to systematically select every nth name in the existing employee card bank until the sample quota was filled.

A three-page questionnaire was mailed to each sample member. Included with the questionniare were a cover letter and a stamped, pre-addressed return envelope. The cover letter outlined instructions for completing and returning the questionnaire and included a deadline date for returns. It encouraged respondents to answer without fear by insuring his anonymity. Company envelopes were used for the interview package (the questionnaire, cover letter and return envelope) in hopes the company stationery would attract greater attention. The return envelope, however, was plain white with an author's home address printed on it and a fabricated

research organization named at the address.

Whether any of these precautions affected the quantity or quality of the returns can not be determined. More than likely, there was no fear of reprisal on the part of employees as many included their names and sometimes their home addresses on the questionnaire or return envelope.

The independent variable, self agreement with newspaper handling of stories, is operationalized by the respondent's reaction to three hypothetical stories. The respondents were first asked how they felt the story "should" be handled, and then asked how the corporate newspaper "would" handle it. If the "should" and "would" responses were the same then it was a match, if not the same then not a match. The highest total of matches is three and the lowest is zero. The hypothetical cases are all considered to be "bad news", they are:

(1) A piece of manufacturing equipment fails and results in an accident.
(2) There is a lay-off.
(3) The company loses a major contract.

The dependent attitudinal variables consist of six statements made about the corporation's newspaper. Respondents used a five-interval Likert-type scale running from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" to respond to these statements:

(1) The News carries information that is worthwhile to most employees.
(2) When the News reports on an issue, it gives all points of view equally and fairly.
(3) The News should carry more news about hourly employees and less about salaried employees.
(4) The information carried in the News is mostly accurate.
(5) The newspaper overlooks most of the important issues and problems in the company.
(6) Coverage of departmental news is usually well balanced in the News.

Findings

The demographic subgroups in the usable sample of this study are (N=93):

Rank	N	%
Non-Management	56	60
Management	37	40
Total	93	100%

Tenure	N	%
Low (10 yrs. or less)	55	59
High (11 yrs. or more)	38	41
Total	93	100%

Agreement with Handling of Stories	N	%
High (2 or 3 agrees)	21	22
Low (less than 2 agrees)	72	78
Total	93	100%

Out of 188 returned questionnaires, only 93 are usable for final analysis because of many individuals who did not respond to at least one question relating to those under analysis.

An interesting trend developed concerning respondent reaction to the handling of news stories by the corporate newspaper. In all three cases where hypothetical stories were presented to respondents, a vast majority felt that the corporate newspaper would have "little comment" while the same employees felt that there should be "in-depth coverage" of these stories.

-- Table #1 about here --

One should keep in mind that all three hypothetical stories deal with what one may categorize as "bad news". Clearly, there is a perceived discrepancy on the part of the employee, concerning the handling of "bad news" events by the corporate newspaper, whereas the employee would like to see more in-depth coverage of these stories but believes that the newspaper will contain little information concerning these stories. This overall finding explains why only 22% of all usable respondents were categorized as "high" in agreement that the corporate newspaper "would" handle these stories as the employee felt they "should" be handled. The respondents who exhibited two or three "should-would" matches were categorized as being "high" in agreement.

When rank, tenure, and "agreement" are used as independent variables with the attitudinal variables as dependent variables several interesting trends develop.

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Mean scores, as presented in Table #2, show between subgrouping differences for the six dependent attitude variables.

-- Table #2 about here --

There are no significant subgroup differences for the statements "Information is worthwhile," or for the statement that the information carried is "mostly accurate".

However, in rating the statement "Gives all points of view" one finds that management and low "agreement" respondents are significantly more apt to disagree ($p < .02$ and $p < .001$, respectively), or exhibit a more negative attitude toward this aspect of the corporate newspaper.

Also, management is significantly more apt to disagree ($p < .001$) that "more news for hourly workers" should be included in the corporate newspaper. No other significant subgrouping differences were noted for this statement.

Finally, the high "agreement" respondents are significantly more apt to disagree ($p < .05$) that the News "overlooks important issues" while they are significantly more apt to agree ($p < .003$) that the coverage of departmental news is usually "well balanced". No other significant subgrouping differences were noted. Both differences showed a tendency for high "agreement" respondents to be more favorable in their evaluation of the corporate newspaper.

Three-way analysis of variance was undertaken to uncover any multivariate interaction effects, as well as to support stated main effect differences. Table #3 contains "information is worthwhile" ratings of the corporate newspaper and uncovers a tenure by story "agreement" interaction ($p < .05$), whereas a main effect had not initially been discovered.

-- Table #3 about here --

The high tenured and high "agreement" individual is significantly more apt to disagree that the corporate newspaper presents worthwhile information ($\bar{x}$=3.00), while the low tenure and high agreement individual is more apt to agree to this statement ($\bar{x}$=4.00). Thus, the new employee who has found himself matching with the way stories "should-would" be handled will be more likely to agree that the information presented in the corporate newspaper is worthwhile.

Another significant interaction occurs for the attitudinal statement, the News is "mostly accurate". Likewise, no significant main effect differences were noted for this statement. Tenure and agreement with the handling of the stories were the two interacting independent variables.

-- Table #4 about here --

Again, the low tenure and high "agreement" individual will respond in a more favorable manner by rating himself the highest on believing that the corporate newspaper is "mostly accurate" ($\bar{x}$=4.06). The low tenure and low "agreement" in handling of stories is least apt to believe that the newspaper is "mostly accurate" ($\bar{x}$=3.56).

In total, one finds that there are wide gaps for a majority of the employees between what they feel "should" be the manner in which "bad news" is handled by the corporate newspaper and the manner in which it "would" be handled. A large number of employees do not believe that these "bad news" stories would be given enough in-depth coverage.

On the other hand, employees are apt to rate the corporate newspaper as being accurate and carrying worthwhile information. In no one instance are employees apt to rate the corporate newspaper in a negative manner, although they tend to agree that the newspaper does "overlook important issues." This belief may be closely tied to the belief that "bad news" will not be handled to their satisfaction.

The findings in this study support other studies in that management level respondents feel,relatively speaking, that the corporate newspaper does not give all points of view and that there should not be more news for hourly workers. This finding supports the contention that management may tend to feel that their point of view is not presented as much as they would like. This finding may also support the defensiveness exhibited by management when they feel that they have lost control of the content of the corporate newspaper.

No distinct trend developed for tenure subgroupings concerning one's attitude toward the corporate newspaper, but the high agreement with the handling of the stories subgroup was consistently more favorable in its attitudinal ratings of the newspaper. However, two interaction effects for the tenure and "agreement" variables showed the younger, high agreement employee as holding the most favorable attitude. This finding tends to refute Dr. Walkers findings from an earlier study where he concludes that: employee confidence in the company magazine and newspaper appears to increase with age and seniority.

Thus, the stated hypothesis is only partially supported. The authors find that the higher story agreement employee, and especially the younger ones, will exhibit a more favorable attitude toward the corporate newspaper.

Conclusions

Based on the findings from this study, employee ratings of a corporate newspaper, one can conclude that the corporate newspaper is favorably perceived. However, there is an undercurrent of discontent on the part of the employees concerning the willingness of the corporate newspaper to adequately report events which may be seen as "bad news" by management.

It seems clear that if the corporation performs in a journalistic manner which employees, especially young employees, consider the way they "should" perform a

corporation may build employee good-will, reduce employee psychological dissonance, and improve employee performance. Younger employees can be effectively communicated with by management through the corporate newspaper if the employee is made to believe that the newspaper is handling "bad news" stories in an in-depth manner.

What the employee "wants" is more openness in discussing good and bad news in the corporate newspaper. As pointed out by a recent IABC research report:

> "...communication does not always result in better informed employees or in favorable opinions about the company. Communication, to be effective, must have an overall purpose and be well planned to that end." (Walker, 1971, p. 15)

By planning on presenting all of the possible facts to employees about corporate events, whether they be perceived as "good" or "bad", management will meet the "wants" of the employee, especially the young employee, and will in turn meet the "wants" of management through a more favorably perceived corporate newspaper which leads to improved employee-management relations.

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The formula to determine sample size is:

$$N_s = \frac{P.C.\ (100 - P.C.)\ Z^2}{T^2}$$

where P.C. = the preliminary estimate of the percentage (90%);
Z = the number of standard error units (2) found from a normal probability table to correspond to the required probability;
T = the required precision or tolerance; (5%)
N_s = the desired sample size.

For the purposes of this survey, therefore;

$$N_s = \frac{90\ (100 - 90)\ 2^2}{5^2}$$

$$= \frac{3600}{25}$$

$$= 144$$

at a 95 per cent confidence level, ± 5% error.

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Table #1

Percentage of Employees Stating Opinion About What the Corporate Newspaper "Should" and "Would" Do in Handling Three Hypothetical Stories

	"Should" Do			"Would" Do		
Hypothetical Stories	Little Comment	Report Facts & Reasons	In-Depth Coverage	Little Comment	Report Facts & Reasons	In-Depth Coverage
(1) A piece of manufacturing equipment fails and results in an accident.	36%	(n=125) 36%	28%	69%	(n=114) 18%	13%
(2) There is a lay-off.	5%	(n=122) 60%	35%	57%	(n=117) 36%	7%
(3) The company loses a major contract.	7%	(n=120) 37%	56%	48%	(n=122) 15%	37%

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Table #2

Mean Scores on Six Attitudinal Statements Rating A Corporate Newspaper by Job Type, Tenure, and Agreement with the Handling of Stories

(N=93)
(1=Disagree; 5=Agree)

	Information is Worthwhile	Gives All Points of View	More News for Hourly Workers	Mostly Accurate	Overlooks Important Issues	Balanced Departmental News
Job Type						
Non-Management (n=56)	3.32	3.67	3.62	3.84	3.08	2.81
Management (n=37)	3.47	3.09	2.65	3.85	3.31	3.18
Tenure						
Low (n=55)	3.63	3.22	3.11	3.81	3.20	3.12
High (n=38)	3.16	3.54	3.16	3.88	3.19	2.86
Agreement with the Handling of Stories						
High (n=21)	3.50	3.78	3.06	3.93	2.93	3.43
Low (n=72)	3.30	2.98	3.21	3.76	3.45	2.56
TOTAL	3.40	3.38	3.14	3.85	3.19	3.00

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Table #3

Rating Corporate Newspaper on "Information is Worthwhile" by Job Type, Tenure, and Agreement with the Handling of Stories

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F	P
Main Effects:					
Job Type	1	0.34	0.34	0.31	0.58
Tenure	1	3.17	3.17	2.87	0.09
Story Agreement	1	0.60	0.60	0.55	0.46
Interactions:					
Job Type x Tenure	1	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.77
Job Type x Story Agreement	1	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.86
Tenure x Story Agreement	1	4.12	4.12	3.74	0.05
Job Type x Tenure x Story Agreement	1	2.02	2.02	0.18	0.67
Error	85	93.71	1.10		

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Table #4

Rating Corporate Newspaper on
"It is Mostly Accurate"
by Job Type, Tenure, and Agreement
with the Handling of Stories

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F	P
Main Effects:					
Job Type	1	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.94
Tenure	1	0.08	0.08	0.24	0.63
Story Agreement	1	0.41	0.41	1.16	0.28
Interactions:					
Job Type x Tenure	1	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.91
Job Type x Story Agreement	1	0.08	0.08	0.22	0.64
Tenure x Story Agreement	1	1.67	1.67	4.69	0.03
Job Type x Tenure x Story Agreement	1	0.03	0.03	0.08	0.78
Error	85	30.19	0.36		